

**Identification**

<i>Nomination</i>	Rapa Nui National Park
<i>Location</i>	Easter Island Province, Valparaiso Region
<i>State Party</i>	Republic of Chile
<i>Date</i>	13 June 1994

**Justification by State Party**

Rapa Nui National Park contains archaeological evidence, consisting mainly of *moai* (megalithic statues), *ahu* (ceremonial structures), houses and ceremonial villages, petroglyphs, and wall paintings. They constitute an outstanding and unique cultural heritage.

**Category of property**

In terms of the categories of property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, Rapa Nui is a *site*.

**History and Description***History*

Rapa Nui was settled around AD 300 by Polynesians, probably from the Marquesas, who brought with them a wholly Stone Age society. All the cultural elements in Rapa Nui prior to the arrival of Europeans indicate that there were no other incoming groups; they rule out the many hypotheses that have been advanced regarding settlement from South America, Melanesia, Egypt, or elsewhere. According to island tradition, the colonizing expedition of fifty people in two canoes was led by King Hotu Matu'a.

Between the 10th and 16th centuries the island community expanded steadily, small settlements being set up along practically the entire coastline. The high cultural level of this society was high, and is best known from its monumental stone figures (*moai*) and ceremonial shrines (*ahu*); it is also noteworthy for a form of pictographic writing (*rongo rongo*), which is so far undeciphered. However, there was an economic and social crisis in the community in the 16th century, attributable perhaps to over-population and environmental deterioration. This resulted in the population being divided into two separate groups of clans who were constantly involved in warfare. The warrior class (*matatoa*) that evolved from this situation gave rise to the so-called "Birdman" cult, based on the small islands offshore of Orongo, which superseded the statue-building religion and was instrumental in most of the *moai* and *ahu* being thrown down and slighted.

On Easter Sunday 1722 Jacob Roggeveen of the Dutch East India Company chanced upon the island, and gave it its European name. The Spanish, led by Captain Don Felipe Gonzalez, claimed the island in 1770, naming it San Carlos in honour of Carlos III. The celebrated English explorer, Captain James Cook, was there briefly in 1774, and his great French contemporary, the Comte de la Pérouse, in 1786. Whalers began to call at the island in the early 19th century, bringing with them venereal disease, which ravaged the population. However, the most devastating impact on the island's society and culture came in the 1860s, when Peruvian slavers carried off some two thousand islanders, including the king and the priests, in 1862. As a result of public protests, about a hundred of them were put on a ship to be taken back to the island in 1865. However, smallpox broke out on board and only fifteen islanders survived to return to Rapa Nui, bringing with them the disease which led to an epidemic that nearly wiped out the remaining islanders: by 1877 only 111 inhabitants remained out of the estimated population of around 10,000 when Europeans first arrived.

The island was annexed by Chile in 1888 in the belief that it had strategic and economic potential, but the mainland farmers who settled there found that agriculture was not profitable. A sheep ranch was moderately successful, but the lease of the company running this operation was revoked in 1952 and the Chilean Navy took control of the island. In the 1960s civil administration was resumed, Easter Island being given the status of a department within the province of Valparaiso. The population is now around two thousand people, about one-third of them from Chile and the remainder descendants of the original Polynesian settlers.

#### *Description*

The most famous archaeological features of Rapa Nui are the monumental stone statues known as *moai*. In her excellent *An Uncommon Guide to Easter Island*, US archaeologist Dr Georgia Lee writes: "I know of no other place which has been so battered by the lunatic fringe ... Wild theories range from spacemen to elephant power as the means of moving the statues." Painstaking research by archaeologists and ethnographers since the second decade of the 20th century has revealed that this remarkable form of monumental sculpture originated on the island itself, without external or extraterrestrial intervention.

The *moai*, of which there are around one thousand on the island, are believed to represent sacred ancestors who watch over the villages and ceremonial areas. They range in height from 2 m to 20 m and are for the most part carved from a distinctive yellow-brown volcanic tuff found only at the great quarry on the Ranu Raraku volcano; a few were carved from red scoria and one, now in the British Museum in London, from basalt. They were carved out of the matrix of the rock using simple picks (*toki*) made of hard basalt and then lowered down the slopes into previously dug holes; when they had been erected work on the backs was completed. Several theories have been advanced concerning the methods of transport from the quarries and raising the statues to a vertical position. This certainly involved the use of wooden rollers and levers, and was a contributory factor in the deforestation of the island. A number of *moai* are still to be found in an uncompleted condition in the quarries, providing valuable information about the method of manufacture. Some of the *moai* have large cylindrical pieces of a red stone known as *pukao*, extracted from the small volcano, Punapau, as headdresses: these are believed to denote special ritual status. There is a clear stylistic evolution in the form and size of the *moai*, from the earlier small, round-headed, and round-eyed figures to the best known large, elongated figures with carefully carved fingers, nostrils, long ears, and other features. Analysis of the distribution of the statues suggests that those found furthest from the quarries are consistently smaller.

The shrines (*ahu*), of which there are around three hundred, vary considerably in size and form. There are certain constant features, notably a raised rectangular platform of large worked stones filled with rubble, a ramp (often paved with rounded beach pebbles), and a levelled area in front of the platform. Some have *moai* on them, and there are tombs in a number of them in which skeletal remains have been discovered. The *ahu* are generally located on the coast and oriented parallel to it. Some of the structures that had been destroyed in the later prehistoric period appear to have been covered in great semi-pyramidal heaps of stones and used as collective burial platforms.

The Orongo ceremonial village, which was probably the centre of a complex of religious practices, related to the Birdman cult, consists of over fifty semi-subterranean stone houses built in contiguous groups, located on the rim of the Ranu Kau crater below a towering cliff. Orongo is the centre of the main concentration of petroglyphs that are scattered throughout the island. Their stylized designs represent fertility symbols, divinities, birds, marine species, boats, and elements of everyday life.

There are abundant remains of the stone houses (*hare*) built by the earlier inhabitants of the island. The houses, which are mostly circular in plan, were raised on basalt foundations and form the nucleus for associated structures such as ovens or hearths (*umu pae*), farm buildings (*manava*), and stone chicken houses (*hare moai*). House groups sited near the coast are sometimes associated with round stone towers (*tupa*), the exact functions of which are not known. The *hare paenga* (commonly known as boat houses because of their shape) are larger and more elaborate in form, and are considered to have been the houses of people of high rank.

The nature of the geology of the island is such that there are many caves (*ana*) around the coast of the island, and these were used in the past by the islanders as temporary or permanent dwellings, being converted by the erection of stone walls at their mouths. A number of these contain wall paintings of deities, birds, and fertility symbols.

## **Management and Protection**

### *Legal status*

Rapa Nui National Park is the property of the Chilean State. It was created under the name of Easter Island National Park in 1935 by Supreme Decree No 103 of the Ministry of Lands and Colonization. On 23 July 1976 it was redesignated Rapa Nui National Park and its boundaries were modified under the provisions of Supreme Decree No 213 of the Ministry of Agriculture. Further boundary changes were made in December 1983 by Supreme Decree No 781 of the Ministry of National Properties.

Legislative protection is provided by the Chilean Forest Law of 1925 (revised 1931). This is reinforced by subsequent legislation, of which the most important are the Convention of Nature Protection and Wildlife Preservation in the Western Hemisphere (1967) and the Government Properties Administration Law (1978).

### *Management*

The responsible national agency is the Division of National Parks of the Chilean Forest Service (Corporación Nacional Forestal - CONAF, Departamento de Patrimonio Silvestre).

There is a management team on the island, headed by the Park Manager, which is responsible for the implementation of the management plan. This was prepared in 1976, with technical support from FAO; a new plan is currently in active preparation, with financial and technical support from the World Monuments Fund, through the Willard and Ruth Somerville legacy.

There is a joint technical agreement between CONAF and the National Centre for Conservation and Restoration of the Dirección de Bibliotecas, Archivos y Museos. Collaborative projects are also in progress with the University of Chile (the School of Anthropology, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the Easter Island Studies Institute of the Faculty of Architecture).

Whilst there is no specific buffer zone around the designated area, development on the rest of the island is strictly controlled and so the entire island may be deemed to constitute an adequate buffer zone.

## **Conservation and Authenticity**

### *Conservation history*

A number of restoration and reconstruction projects have been carried out on Rapa Nui. The most important of these were:

- 1960: Start of work by a joint expedition of the Universities of Chile and Wyoming to restore the Ahu Akivi monument, composed on seven large *moai*.
- 1969-70: Restoration work in the Tahai area by Chilean and US archaeologists from the Universities of Chile and Wyoming at the request of the Chilean Government and supported by the International Fund for Monuments.
- 1974-76: Restoration of the Orongo ceremonial village.
- 1978: Excavation and reconstruction of Ahu Nau Nau.
- 1986: Experimental consolidation treatment of the *moai* at Ahu Hanga Kio'e by the National Centre for Conservation and Restoration.

In addition, there have been several expert studies relating to conservation, by UNESCO Consultant W Domaslowsky (1981), ICCROM scientists N Stanley Price and A Elena Charola (mid 1980s), Georgia Lee on the petroglyphs (mid 1980s), and Dr Jo Ann Van Tilburg on the *moai* (late 1980s). An International Meeting on Lavas and Volcanic Tuffs was held on the island in October 1990.

The analysis of the current conservation needs by the State Party emphasizes the need for better visitor management so as to minimize impacts on the monuments. These impacts include surface collection of artefacts, defacement of petroglyphs, and grass fires. There is also a need for the development of methods for the control of lichens, algae, and micro-organisms in wall paintings.

#### *Authenticity*

Rapa Nui National Park is in effect a single archaeological site (or perhaps a relict cultural landscape as defined in paragraph 39(ii) of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (WHC/2 Revised February 1994)). Its authenticity is high in that there has been little intervention since virtual abandonment of the area in the later 19th century. A number of reconstructions of *ahu* have been made on the basis of strictly controlled scientific investigations and there has been some re-erection of fallen *moai*, with replacement of the red stone headdresses, but these do not go beyond the permissible limits of anastylosis as defined in the 1964 Venice Charter.

#### **Evaluation**

##### *Action by ICOMOS*

An ICOMOS expert mission visited Easter Island in March 1995, in company with experts of the World Monuments Fund. ICOMOS also consulted Dr Paul Bahn, a leading expert on the archaeology of Rapa Nui and author (with John Flenley) of *Easter Island, Earth Island* (London, 1982), the most important recent study of the island, and Paul Dingwall (Department of Conservation, New Zealand), an expert on its ecological history, and a member of the IUCN Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas (CNPPA).

##### *Qualities*

Rapa Nui National Park contains the substantial vestiges of a remarkable cultural phenomenon, the evolution without any external influences of a monumental stone sculptural and architectural tradition of extraordinary power which is without parallel anywhere in the world.

##### *Comparative analysis*

Much of the significance of the Easter Island culture is its uniqueness, and so the question of comparative studies does not arise.

##### *ICOMOS recommendations for future action*

Serious management of the Rapa Nui National Park is a relatively recent innovation: before it had been passive rather than active. The resource requirements in manpower and services in the Park include additional ranger personnel and their training, the creation of a documentation centre on the island itself, and improvement of signage and visitor facilities. The new management plan currently being prepared with the active support of the World Monuments Fund will make a substantial contribution to the improvement of the present situation. It is recommended that this should be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for comment by the Secretariat and by ICOMOS as soon as it is completed.

#### **Recommendation**

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria i, iii, and v*.

Rapa Nui National Park contains one of the most remarkable cultural phenomena in the world. An artistic and architectural tradition of great power and imagination was developed by a society that was completely isolated from external cultural influences of any kind for over a millennium. The substantial remains of this culture blend with their natural surroundings to create an unparalleled cultural landscape.

ICOMOS-IUCN, September 1995





Rapa Nui : moai redressés sur Ahu Tahai (premier plan) et Ahu Vai Uri /  
Re-erected moai on Ahu Tahai (foreground) and Ahu Vai Uri